

Minorities versus Majorities: Multiculturalism in Retreat

„The essential problem is not the political issue of European federation or the practical question of European economic organization. The vital question is how to preserve the spiritual inheritance of Europe...”¹ These words were written by the excellent English historian, Christopher Dawson in his book „*Understanding Europe*”, published in 1951. Though this work was concerned with an analysis of the post-war crisis of our continent, it offers a valid lesson for our days as well. The conservative Dawson pointed out that the essence of Europe consists in her Judeo-Christian inheritance whose values must be defended at all costs. And he diagnosed very precisely what threatened them most: the fact that Europe had lost faith in her own cultural values. Probably we do not commit a mistake in supposing that behind all the present problems of Europe, including the lack of ideas how to treat the migration crisis one can find this attitude.

It is the assumption of the present writer that the ideology of multiculturalism has also contributed to the erosion of Europe’s traditional inheritance. It undermines those values that help to reject excessive moral and cultural relativism and provide a solid basis for reconciling the common spiritual traditions with the principle of nationality. In Dawson’s words: “The European nation has always been a part of the greater unity of European culture”.² Of course, this topic needs a sophisticated approach because multiculturalism seeks to present an answer to a very real challenge. This study attempts to offer a succinct analysis of the crucial ideas of multiculturalism from a conservative point of view.

The politics of recognition and the pitfalls of „essentialism”

At the descriptive level multiculturalism refers only to the undisputed fact of the constantly growing cultural diversity of modern societies. However, the prescriptive interpretation wishes to define what kind of conclusions we should draw from growing heterogeneity and what political steps we should take to tackle the problems arising out of cultural conflicts. Needless to say, the problems stem from this use of the concept. A multicultural society need not be also a *multiculturalist* one, i.e. it need not follow the normative claims of multiculturalism. As for these claims, they aim at eliminating the „inequalities” between majority and minority cultures, at demolishing national cultures while encouraging migrants to preserve their culture also in their new homelands. For some reason their identities are supposed to be better than those of the host countries...

It is not easy to formulate general statements about the theory of multiculturalism which had crystallized in the last quarter of the 20th century because under its aegis a number of conflicting views were formed. However, that much can be stated unequivocally that the arguments for multiculturalism rely on two ideological traditions: the liberal- egalitarian and the communitarian. The best-known representative of the former is the Canadian Will Kymlicka who laid emphasis on the liberal idea of equal rights, criticizing traditional liberalism for failing to take into account – besides individual rights – the rights of the groups. His starting point is that though the liberal rights can eliminate discrimination, they do not support the preservation of minority cultures. Thus he espouses the idea of demanding special additional rights for minorities.

This approach differs from the „communitarian” tradition whose most important multiculturalist theoretician is Charles Taylor. His key concept, „the politics of recognition” highlights the fact that the equality of citizenship rights does not necessarily involve the recognition of identity.³ Taylor rejects „the liberalism of rights” because it is “blind” to differences; as a result “the politics

of difference” holds that all cultures are of equal value, of equal worth. The main problem with this approach is that it simply leaves the achievements and the quality of a culture out of consideration, resulting in a complete relativism.

It follows from the inner logic of the “politics of difference” that it tends to emphasize the differences, to celebrate “otherness”, i.e. the state of “being other” or different. In connection with this stance the majority of multiculturalists tend to “essentialise” minority cultures, treating them as if they were tightly bounded, homogeneous entities, inevitably evoking the dangers of excessive ethnic fragmentation and cultural separatism. One of the most vocal opponents of “essentialism”, Anne Phillips says that as a result “multiculturalism then appears not as a cultural liberator but as a cultural straitjacket”, denying the members of a minority culture “the chance to cross cultural borders”.⁴

Parekh on “moral monism”

Bhikhu Parekh rejected the “essentialist” approach to multiculturalism. In the last fifteen years or so he became – at least in the eyes of a large number of multiculturalists – the most respected theoretician of multiculturalism. He was born in India but lives in Britain and has undoubtedly become a significant contemporary British political philosopher. He published works on political thinkers, including Bentham, Marx and Gandhi but his most influential books aimed at elaborating the theoretical justification of multiculturalism. “*Rethinking Multiculturalism*” was published in 2000 and “*The New Politics of Identity*” in 2008. His approach owed much to communitarian thought but it cannot be categorized as communitarian; he broke with doctrinaire liberalism but stuck to liberal values.⁵

The devotees of multiculturalism rarely pose the question why in fact cultural diversity is a value in itself. Parekh thinks it important to provide an

answer. His argumentation attacks the so-called “moral monism” which holds that only one way of life is fully human. Diversity is indispensable, he argues, because “no culture embodies all that is valuable in human life and develops the full range of possibilities... Different cultures thus correct and complement each other.”⁶ Diversity makes it also possible for an individual to step out of his/her culture, so he/she need not remain imprisoned within it – this argument clearly reflects Parekh’s rejection of “essentialism”.

In light of this one need not be surprised that he welcomes globalisation since it tends to demolish the boundaries of national cultures, paving the way for “intercultural dialogue” which is a crucial element in his theory of multiculturalism. He criticizes sharply the well-known conception of Samuel Huntington about the importance and role of civilizations. He agrees with the influential American political scientist in that political communities are culturally embedded but he says that this fact must not be overrated. Huntington’s thesis is deeply flawed, he writes, because he neglects other – political and economic factors – and thus makes the mistake of “cultural reductionism”.⁷ This is a bit surprising given the fact that in his works he also concentrates his attention on cultural identity.

In Parekh’s view a multicultural society needs to develop a political structure that can reconcile two basic – and conflicting - demands, diversity and unity. He agrees with most of the multiculturalists that it is not enough to tolerate differences: the organization of the state and the dominant political norms should be so devised that we no longer think in the old categories of “majority” and “minority”. Consequently, a political community must not commit itself to one particular cultural tradition. Parekh rejects any institutional preference for the culture of the majority.

Identity and the political community

National culture and the nation-state are primary targets of multiculturalism. Parekh expressed a sharp criticism about national cultures in many of his works. For example in the *Introduction to Rethinking Multiculturalism* one finds the following statement: “The idea of national culture makes little sense, and the project of cultural unification on which many past societies and all modern states have relied for their stability and cohesion is no longer viable today.”⁸ He worked out a conception of national identity which is more sophisticated than earlier attempts by multiculturalist theoreticians but which stands in sharp contrast with the conservative view – and even with the “liberal nationalist” approach.

However, Parekh cannot be classified as a liberal who is concerned solely with individuals, deeming the collective identity of a community superfluous. Therefore he does not accept the “proceduralist” approach to political integration which assumes that it is sufficient to create a neutral state laying down the minimally necessary rules of conduct.⁹ He rejects the view that citizens can agree on the structure of political authority and on the norms to be followed without some degree of cultural consensus. He is convinced that national identity is necessary because it helps to foster a “common sense of belonging” among the diverse communities of a multicultural society - but he fundamentally re-interprets its concept.

In his view one can speak about national identity in two different ways: as the identity of a person and as the identity of a political community. As for the latter, it should be made as “neutral” as possible. In keeping with this requirement he emphasizes that “the identity of a political community should be located in its political structure”, in other words political communities should be defined in “politico-institutional” terms, instead of “ethno-cultural terms”.¹⁰ It can be asked – and even the noted multiculturalist Tariq Modood posed the question - how it is possible for such a polity to include ethno-cultural minority

groups.¹¹ To this question one finds no convincing answer in Parekh's books. The crucial point in Parekh's approach is that his conception of national identity does not suppose the existence of a nation – at least in the conventional sense of the word. In *"The New Politics of Identity"* he expounds: "National identity is not a substance but rather a cluster of interrelated tendencies..."¹² Thus in Parekh's framework the members of a political community can have a "national" identity without constituting a nation based on shared history and culture. This is why one of his commentators, Varun Uberoi points out emphatically: "Uniquely, Parekh advocates national identities without nations and nationalism and does so without attaching the questionable forms of importance to such identities that conservative and liberal nationalists do."¹³

What kind of features should, then, the Parekhian "national identity" have?

First of all Parekh emphasizes that it should be "inclusive". Now, this is a legitimate and justified position but the remark that he adds to this is more than problematic: he interprets the "inclusive" character as prohibiting giving priority to any cultural tradition, in fact divesting the community of its right to preserve its own culture. Second, he warns that "we should not... place excessive moral and political weight on it". It is revealing that he refers to Margaret Thatcher's conception of British identity as a horrifying illustration of the wrong and dangerous interpretation of national identity. Third, he points out that national identity can serve only domestic purposes; "it is not meant to impress foreigners". Finally, he expresses his view that the precise content of common identity "should grow out of a vigorous democratic debate" – implicitly assuming that the democratic state is capable of ensuring the necessary level of social integration, without the benefits of the membership in a nation.¹⁴

This approach resembles markedly the concept of "postnational constellation" invented by the noted German sociologist, Jürgen Habermas

whose idea of “*Verfassungspatriotismus*”, i.e. constitutional patriotism also aims at developing political attachment to a liberal constitution, separating the common identity from the identity of the majority.¹⁵ But Parekh’s view of national identity differs sharply from that of Edmund Burke who considered the nation to be a “partnership” among the living, the dead and those who are yet to be born. The conservatives - rejecting the primacy of the principle of ethnicity – look upon the nation as a historically evolved spiritual and cultural community, whereas Parekh – though not denying the importance of some kind of collective identity – refuses this view, not attributing real significance to history, to inherited cultural traditions.¹⁶ This position wishes to “de-nationalize” the political community because “de-nationalized citizenship” is, in Rattansi’s words, “far more appropriate to a rapidly globalizing world.”¹⁷ It seems that the price for accepting multiculturalism is acquiescence in abolishing nations.

Immigration: a source of diversity?

In the multiculturalist literature Will Kymlicka’s approach to immigration differs at least partially from the mainstream. In his well-known book, in *Multicultural Citizenship* he points out that most immigrants (as distinct from refugees) choose to leave their own culture, “they have uprooted themselves”, consequently it is not unjust not to give them the legal status of national minorities. (The minority status of the latter is “unchosen”.) Kymlicka’s conclusion is that to expect them to integrate is justified “so long as immigrants had the option to stay in their original culture”. In his view immigrants voluntarily relinquish those rights that stem from their original national membership.¹⁸ Of course, he adds that the state must help them in the process of integration by “polyethnic rights”.

And what is the position of Parekh concerning immigration? He regards immigration as an important source of cultural diversity and does not share Kymlicka’s view in respect of differentiating among various minority groups.

He makes four significant statements which, according to him, should inform the discussion of immigration. First he stresses that “we should not think nostalgically that society was culturally homogenous before immigration began”. His second warning is that immigrants must not be treated as if they were a homogenous group, we must not ignore their different ways of relating to the host society. Third, he alleges that the diversity produced by immigration “is not necessarily deeper or more extensive than that already obtaining in most receiving societies.” Fourth, he calls attention to the fact that contemporary immigration differs from earlier patterns; today the relationship of the immigrants to the receiving society “is largely contractual and lacks an element of gratitude”. And the current political climate encourages migrants to maintain their identity.¹⁹ The present writer agrees fully only with the fourth statement.

Parekh also expounds his view about the potential strategies concerning immigrants. As for assimilation, he calls it a mistake to suppose that the stability of social order requires the assimilation of migrants into the culture of the majority. The assimilationist approach commits the mistake of asking “for a greater degree and range of unity than is possible or necessary”.²⁰

He has reservations about integration as well since its idea “is not as innocent as it seems”. He acknowledges that immigrants should commit themselves to respecting the institutions and values of their new society but integration becomes a one-way process if the burden to integrate is placed solely on the immigrants. In Parekh’s view the host society should also adjust to the immigrants. Integration is also vulnerable “to subtle forms of racism” because the inherent logic of integration encourages the receiving societies to select among the immigrants, applying different standards to different ethnic groups.²¹

What does then Parekh offer? A “moral contract” with the immigrants. He is convinced that instead of asking how immigrants can be assimilated or integrated, “we should ask how they can become equal citizens and be bound to

the rest by the ties of common belonging”. This approach presupposes a two-way process: the receiving society must welcome the immigrants. As for the latter, “they should see their country of settlement as their home”. Parekh adds, significantly, “whatever other homes they might also happen to have”.

He does not analyse the phenomenon of “migrant transnationalism”, though it would have been worth doing. As Rainer Bauböck points out, international migration has created “a mismatch between territorial and personal boundaries of polities” – in other words a significant percentage of migrants continue to have a close spiritual and cultural, and often even direct political ties with their country of origin.²² Now the question poses itself: is it reasonable to suppose that immigrants with sharply differing cultural backgrounds will become the devotees and propagators of the democracy they experience in their new home-countries or will they remain committed to the cultural traditions of their native countries? There is no simple and definite answer to this question but the European experiences warn us not to be overly optimistic. Parekh’s idea of a “moral contract”, though undoubtedly attractive, contains too many utopian expectations.

Whatever we may think about Parekh’s ideas, it is a hard fact that in those Western European countries that committed themselves to multiculturalist policies one finds almost apartheid-like segregation and “parallel lives”. Following the terrorist bombings in London in 2005 Trevor Phillips, the chairman of the *Commission for Racial Equality* warned that Britain was in the danger of “sleepwalking” into segregation. (“Some districts are on their way to becoming fully fledged ghettos...”) He added in his widely publicized declaration that “in recent years we have focused far too much on the ‘multi’ and not enough on common culture”. Multiculturalism, he admitted, was responsible to a large extent for the blame.²³ Because of space limits this study only refers to the serious disturbances on the outskirts of Paris in the autumn of

2005, the headscarf-debate, the murder of the Dutch film-maker Theo van Gogh, the Danish cartoons affair or to the wild reaction to the book by the German Social Democrat Thilo Sarrazin “*Deutschland schafft sich ab*” (*Germany Abolishes Itself*) in 2010 – all of these testify to the apparent failure of the hitherto accepted models of multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism versus interculturalism?

It was not only leading conservative politicians (Cameron, Sarkozy, Merkel) who spoke about the failure of multiculturalist policies but the highly respected Kymlicka also admitted that multiculturalism had come under sustained attack and was in retreat in the Western world. He placed the critics into two groups: the “anti-multiculturalists”, who reject the ideas of multiculturalism on principle and the “post-multiculturalists” who sympathize with the claims of multiculturalism but who also think that - despite the noble intentions – multicultural theories and/or practices – proved to be seriously defective.²⁴ Kymlicka himself highlights four problems which the earlier theories of multiculturalism could not resolve.

1. Multiculturalism has not taken into account the huge numbers of illegal immigrants (and asylum-seekers) who face the prospect of having to return home. It has left out of consideration the “temporary” migrants as well.

2. Multiculturalism has considered the issues of minorities only in the traditional socio-political dimension, i.e. the risks of state security, the potential links with terrorism have not received attention in its existing theories.

3. There is a lack of “good theories between civic integration policies and multiculturalism policies”.

4. Multiculturalism has not yet adequately addressed the specific challenges arising out of religion; this is especially true of Islam.²⁵

In his book about multiculturalism, published in 2011 with the express intention of providing a general introduction to its history and ideas, Rattansi also comes to the conclusion that earlier theories of multiculturalism have to be rethought and renewed, especially because the idea of multiculturalism “has been too prone to essentialism”.²⁶ There can be no doubt that multiculturalism as a political project has not been successful. In the view of the present writer a most promising attempt at creating a new paradigm to tackle the problems of cultural diversity was made by Gérard Bouchard, a French Canadian historian-sociologist from Quebec. He published his theses in the law journal of Montreal’s *McGill University* in 2011 with the title “*What is Interculturalism?*”.²⁷ Commenting upon this new approach Charles Taylor remarked that there is no major theoretical shift in “interculturalism”, only “semantic distinctions”.²⁸ However, the present writer is convinced that the difference is much more significant.

This assumption is proved by Bouchard himself, when he *expressis verbis* emphasizes in his article: interculturalism is not “a disguised form” of multiculturalism.²⁹ He even posits that multiculturalism and interculturalism are rooted in opposite paradigms and he also thinks it important to point out that a “pluralist mindset” does not lead necessarily to accepting multiculturalism. (It is worth noting that the term “interculturalism” is also used by Parekh and Rattansi but in a totally different sense from its Quebec interpretation. They use it in the context of “intercultural dialogue”.) Bouchard’s ideas aroused the keen interest of the noted multiculturalist, Tariq Modood as well – and urged him to express a low-key but sharp criticism.³⁰

The most significant difference consists in the fact that Bouchard takes into account the majority. Theories of multiculturalism usually conjoin the espousal of minorities with the attacks on majorities; even Modood admits that multiculturalists have not addressed the issue about the majority. Bouchard

formulates his standpoint in the following words: “interculturalism concerns itself with the interests of the majority culture, whose desire to perpetuate and maintain itself is perfectly legitimate, as much as it does with the interests of minorities and immigrants...”³¹ How does this model, more concretely, relate to the majority?

First of all, its author acknowledges that majority cultures can legitimately feel anxiety in the face of minorities. He adds: “Indeed, they can create a more or less acute sense of threat within the majority culture not only in terms of its rights, but also in terms of its values, traditions, language, memory and identity (not to mention its security).”³² This leads him to work out the principle of “majority cultural precedence” summed up in the following way: “interculturalism allows for the recognition of certain elements of ad hoc (or contextual) precedence for the majority culture”. This precedence can be based on “seniority or history” in Bouchard’s approach – he argues that these elements of precedence are present in all societies. At the same time he makes it clear that he does not wish “to formalize or establish this idea as a general legal principle.” Were he to do so, it would mean a radical break with multiculturalism which is certainly not Bouchard’s intention. Even so Modood remarks that his ideas are “within a touching distance” of liberal nationalism. Though the normative *significance* of a majority culture might be accepted as a fact, its normative *precedence* – he stresses - must be definitely rejected in any form.³³

Revolt against Europe?

Though Bouchard has had no ambition to part radically with multiculturalism, the conservatives of the 21st century might have good reasons to reject the dominant theories of multiculturalism and – at least in the view of the present writer - the Canadian historian’s interculturalism-model might serve as an excellent starting-point. The interpretation of pluralism underlying his approach is unequivocally “integrational” because it takes into consideration

both the minorities and the majorities. It is easy to agree with Bouchard's argumentation based on a "sociological perspective" that societies need a symbolic foundation as well – formal rules cannot adequately fulfil this function. Especially in times of tension only "widely held common reference points" ensure the necessary solidarity.³⁴ Preference for majority culture (within limits!) can certainly be reconciled with respect for minority cultures though democracy undoubtedly faces more problems in a multicultural society – after all, its classic pattern was originally designed for "monocultural" societies.

The unique character of each culture can readily be acknowledged but the "equality" of cultures demanded by multiculturalists is not only impossible – its artificial realization is not desirable at all. In fact, the demand for the recognition of the "equal value of all cultures" more often than not relies on an almost complete value-relativism and such "dogmatized relativism" cannot be endorsed from a conservative point of view.³⁵ Conservatives are not enemies of cultural diversity but proportions are crucial for them. Wolfgang Grassl and Barry Smith were right to point out in their article in *The Salisbury Review* about the benefits of cultural diversity in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy: "it seems necessary that the cultures involved be not merely to a degree contiguous but also part of some common embracing cultural whole".³⁶ The extent to which immigrants cause problems for host societies depends – as Erich Weede writes in *Hungarian Review* – "on the similarity of social norms between source and target countries".³⁷ If cultural differences are sharp, integration is absolutely indispensable. But only such a political community might hope to successfully integrate migrants that possesses a strong identity.

Dawson is right in stressing that Europe's civilization is unique; "in so far as a world society or a world civilization can be said to exist, it is the child of Europe".³⁸ In view of the historic achievements of Europe it is very difficult to understand why she has lost her self-confidence, why there has occurred a

psychological break with her traditions, what has prompted a veritable revolt “from within” against her civilization. Most theories of multiculturalism, deeming it important to demolish traditional values and national identities, also form part of this revolt. Roger Scruton uses the term “*oikophobia*” to designate the strange phenomenon of repudiating our own inheritance.

If we look for answers, the first task is to ascertain and understand our own European identity.

Gergely Egedy

¹ Christopher Dawson, *Understanding Europe*, Image Books (Doubleday and Company), New York, 49.

² *Op. cit.* 197.

³ Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism. Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton University Press, 1992.

⁴ Anne Phillips, *Multiculturalism Without Culture*, Princeton University Press, 2007, 14.

⁵ He also acted as the president of some important commissions (Commission for Racial Equality, Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain) and in 2000 he became a member of the House of Lords. For his intellectual influence see: Paul Kelly, Situating Parekh's Multiculturalism: Bhikhu Parekh and Twentieth-Century British Political Theory, in: Varun Uberoi. – Tariq Modood (eds.): *Multiculturalism Rethought. Interpretations, Dilemmas and New Directions. Essays in Honour of Bhikhu Parekh*, Edinburgh University Press, 2015, 29-54.

⁶ Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*. Macmillan, London, 2000, 167.

⁷ Bhikhu Parekh, *The New Politics of Identity*, Palgrave-Macmillan, London, 2008, 156-157.

⁸ Parekh: *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, 8

⁹ *Op.cit.* 199-201.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.* 231-232.

¹¹ Modood is quoted in: Uberoi, Varun: Introduction – Parkehian Multiculturalism, in: Uberoi – Modood (eds): *op.cit.*, 13.

¹² Parekh, *The New Politics*, 60.

¹³ Varun Uberoi, National Identities and Moving Beyond Conservative and Liberal Nationalism, in: Uberoi-Modood (eds) : *op. cit.* 86.

¹⁴ Parekh, *op. cit.* 64-65.

¹⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2001.

¹⁶ For a conservative approach to the nation see: Gergely Egedy, *Konzervativizmus az ezredfordulón* (Conservatism at the Turn of the Millennium), Magyar Szemle Könyvek, Bp, 143-171.

¹⁷ Ali Rattansi, *Multiculturalism (A Very Short Introduction)*, Oxford University Press, 2011, 123-124.

¹⁸ Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995, 95-96.

¹⁹ Parekh, *op. cit.*, 81-82.

²⁰ *Op cit.* 83.

²¹ *Op. cit.* 86.

²² Rainer Bauböck, Towards a Political Theory of Migrant Transnationalism, *International Migration Review*, Vol. 37, Issue 3 (September 2003), 700-723.

²³ Phillips is quoted by Rattansi, *op. cit.* 75-76. According to Rattansi Phillips exaggerated the problems connected with multiculturalism.

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- ²⁴Will Kymlicka, The Essentialist Critique of Multiculturalism: Theories, Policies, Ethos, in: Uberoi-Modood (eds), *op.cit.*, 209-210.
- ²⁵*Op. cit.* 241-243.
- ²⁶Rattansi, *op.cit.* 152.
- ²⁷Gérard Bouchard, What is Interculturalism?, *McGill Law Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 2, 2011, 435-468. (online: lawjournal.mcgill.ca/userfiles/.../2710852-Bouchard_e.p...).
- ²⁸Charles Taylor, Multiculturalism, Interculturalism,, in: Uberoi-Modood (eds), *op. cit.* 335.
- ²⁹Bouchard, *op. cit.* 438.
- ³⁰Modood, Tariq: Rethinking Multiculturalism, Interculturalism and the Majority, in: Uberoi-Modood (eds): *op.cit.*, 348-368.
- ³¹Bouchard, *op. cit.* 438.
- ³²*Op. cit.* 445.
- ³³Modood, *op. cit.* 355.
- ³⁴Bouchard: *op. cit.* 455.
- ³⁵In more details: Egedy, *op. cit.* 232-237.
- ³⁶Grassl, Wolfgang – Smith, Barry, The Politics of National Diversity, in: Roger Scruton (ed.): *Essays from The Salisbury Review*, The Claridge Press, London, 1988.
- ³⁷Erich Weede, Mass Immigration: Cost tor Benefit?, *Hungarian Review*, Vol. VI. No. 6 2015, 32.
- ³⁸Dawson, *op. cit.* 32.